



ACHIM SZEPANSKI 2016-02-10

KATJA DIEFENBACH INTERVIEWS ACHIM SZEPANSKI (FORCE INC, MILLE PLATEAUX, RIOT BEATS)

DOCUMENTATION, MASHINES, NONMUSIC ANTI-DEUTSCH, DELEUZE, MILLE PLATEAUX

This interview was done in 1994, when Achim Szepanski founded Mille Plateaux after a long correspondence with Gilles Deleuze. Ten years later, in 2004, the label was destroyed by a kind of mafia-assemblage, consisting of the distributor EFA, the German state, Gema and other rackets.

[Interview in German language here](#)

Katja Diefenbach; KD: Force Inc. has established a Sublabel that is named after the most important book from Deleuze and Guattari, MILLE PLATEAUX. What connection do you see between Techno and post-structuralist theory?

Achim Szepanski; AS: According to statements from Foucault his books should function as little tool kits. The thinking of powers and knowledge is also thinking as strategy and subversion, which escapes even the writer's intentions. Foucault himself said that the more unplanned uses that his books take on the more it would please him. I think that it is in this sense that we are trying to use the thoughts of Deleuze and Guattari in Mille Plateaux; to find instruments and tools that directly inspire the process of producing sounds. The central theme of this book, in the chapters about music, is that today the essential relationship in music – but also in philosophy – is that which is between material and forces. This means that the sound machines that have structures, like the synthesiser or the computer, produce sound material in that they molecularise, that means they break down, particular forms of music and at the same time expand it. Music is then more than the reproduction of tones, it is a process to produce sounds. The tone is first of all just a noise that is bound up in a canon of rules – and is only a tone in these circumstances. The music of the whole occident builds a system, creates models that filter the noise, the rauschen* (electrical noise) and the currents of sound, and controls what is heard. The Paris school for example, turned against this exclusion by treating concrete sound material like hissing, water drops, the noises on the street, as genuine musical sound qualities. The synthesiser is a structure that, through the varied possibilities of sound synthesis, not only makes new sounds audible, but also the process of the production itself. It is the musical work with sound material itself that allows new energies, intensities, to be captured, according to Deleuze.

KD: On your first CD on the 'Modulation & Transformation' label, you quote a piece from Mille Plateaux; a song of praise for the synthesiser as a consistency machine. How would you explain that?

AS: The synthesiser is a machine to generate sounds. Particular currents of sound and sound spectrums are created through the connection and combination of individual modules. This refers to the analogue synthesiser. It is a creative process that holds the various sound materials together, the various elements in the material itself – one thinks of oscillators, generators – that serve the working of the original signals. At the same time the sound material must be able to float between the various synthesisers, sequencers and computers, and be accessible for synchronisation. Deleuze refers to the mechanical self as the synthesis of heterogeneity, diversity. This synthesis of sounds needs a certain consistency; the synthesis must not make the individual elements unrecognisable, otherwise everything becomes a suffocating din in the end. The question that arises with Deleuze is the following: How can the inaudible be made audible by these machines. Capture energies, allow currents of intense quantities to flow, question the music about the degrees of fastness or slowness; all this gives the music cosmic dimensions. Music however seems powerless when it creates a jumble of sounds and tones; a permanent overflow of signals makes us become unconscious. We also become unconscious when we hear nothing but perfect harmony, just repetition and its refrain. Perfect melodies and perfect chords, that's what folk music and pop music offer us daily, just the circulation of clean sound currents, cleaned of the noises and sounds that could disturb prosperity. The masses can also be forced into deep sleep by a synthesiser. So the harmony, the chord, even the tone itself must be exploded; one must open the door to noise itself, make even the channel to the sound currents quake. That is the place for electronic music to strike in, whether one calls it techno or what ever.

KD: Guattari has been a life long advocate for a vague movement for the acquisition, the use of machines. For example, he spoke on the Italian radio station, 'Radio Alice'. Do you all see your techno – production within a movement, somewhere between radio pirates, computer hackers and techno – producers?

AS: What the system always tries to shut out, of course the world wide computer net system too, is the interface. The hackers create noise when they break into other systems, that leads to the destruction of some areas of that system. But at the same time this noise can signalise the beginning of a fresh news. This depends on the complexity of the system and place from which I move. This means that the exclusion function is at the same time also an inclusion function. The systems expect the noise, with malfunctions, and they develop mechanisms to correct and regulate deviations and disturbances. They acclimatise themselves to the deviations. In the same way that one became acclimatised to the lunatics, the radio pirates etc. and all the other dissidents of the seventies, so one becomes acclimatised to hackers, the techno – dissidents of the nineties. The media industries occupy the sub-culture, but at the same time alignments develop, potentials build up, that cannot so easily be occupied by the system. In the same way that computer hackers operate with sign sequences in electronic space, so do the techno dissidents use sound material in electronic sound spaces; free from any semantic that would force itself onto a memory. A euphoric movement could look something like that. But at the same time one moves around in these sub-systems, the refuse that the large systems, including the military, throw off. They are reduced for the user, who is allowed to operate the gadgets that the leisure industry offers him.

KD: What are the consequences for you all? Do you still use the term techno and move around the edge of the scene, or do you try to move along your own path?

AS: One must assume that the industry causes forced restrictions in the music, not only through the building of the hardware and the employment of software, but it also reforms the manner of distribution and the listening habits of the masses through music's own suppliers, the former independent labels. The scene, however, is a conglomeration of heterogeneous groups. Is it on the periphery as opposed to the centre? One spends time on the periphery and is then suddenly in the centre again. In some cases, the periphery of one system leads directly to the centre of an other system. The interaction of the systems itself produces a net of centres and peripheries. 'Moving on the edge', is an unsuitable metaphor. Molar machines are systems with many variables and changing control mechanisms. The periphery is repeatedly surrounded and vice versa, the scenes work on norms that are greedily adopted by the systems, if they serve the development of complexity and control. In this way systems and scenes can strengthen each other, but of course always under the dominance of the molar machines. If one analyses the reactions to Force Inc., by both the industry and the techno-scene, one sees that the same mechanisms are at work in both. One excludes and at the same time distributes honours. One kills and castrates. In these conditions today, one must look for alignms a jumble of sounds and tones; a permanent overflow of signals makes us become unconscious. We also become unconscious when we hear nothing but perfect harmony, just repetition and its refrain. Perfect melodies and perfect chords, that's what folk music and pop music offer us daily, just the circulation of clean sound currents, cleaned of the noises and sounds that could disturb prosperity. The masses can also be forced into deep sleep by a synthesiser. So the harmony, the chord, even the tone itself must y different from the development of a techno track, in every dimension. Techno tracks are produced through the so called mixing process, a certain synthesiser and its sounds are synchronised through a sequencer, the midi-line transfers all parameters between synthesiser and computer. In the end all the sounds are layered over one another through the mixer, sounds are cancelled or added etc.... And then often a dramaturgy of the track appears, that is audible, as planned, and that appears then as the creativity of the producer. OVAL however finds itself in an acoustic empty space and their 'organisation' allows music to develop, music that according to their statements cannot be wanted, because one could not imagine it. How does that happen? On the level of computer games and simulation. What is found becomes music, an organisation of sounds developed through filtering the rauschen. That means signals are sent through the time variation filter or sinus waves are added. They are then stored these days on a digital medium, for example the CD. In the practical execution itself, OVAL shows the production of what they call sound design, and that music does not only have to reject the world of noise, but that music can also integrate these noises. The interference noise, in the case of the OVAL CD, skipping noises or accidental noise itself, are the found materials that are not layered as in the mixing process, but flow simultaneously into one another; loops with loops joined in a completely additive and cumulative manner. The midi software builds the door that

opens to time horizons, beyond the linear chain of time moments. The time becomes molecular, a time of jumps, reversal, delay. OVAL creates a music that goes forward but at the same time it skips strangely, but this skipping is always a micro jump. These micro jumps are audible as clicks and serve the joining of loops and different time environments that are peculiar to these loops. Rhythm, when the sounds and tones are rhythmatised, they become a web of pure speed. The conception of music itself becomes available for arrangement, in this way. Here small minority strategies are built that annul particular concepts of making music and music listening.

KD: How far has the development of the production means, the productive forces, changed the concept of music? Which reality has music under digital conditions?

AS: Music, not the reproduction of tones, but the creation of new sounds, that is the condition to start from. As the composer could previously review the sound results of his notation only retrospectively, and because the demands of the composer on the music machine could only be relatively realised through the interpreter's increased practice, so the interface – person / machine – must itself become the issue. Then the individual types of the instruments themselves could be set in order, they proved themselves to be compositional straight jackets. In this century the first electronic instruments were developed, also the first sound storage, tape recorders. This was important for concrete music. Now real existing material could be worked on; cuts, transformations, techniques of slowing down and speeding up came into use. The analogue synthesiser was already being talked about, the invention and mass distribution of the microprocessors allowed sound runs; compositions as the generation of music through the use of algorithms appeared. At the same time music became a frequency phenomenon. Vibration runs were created, that can be dangerous for the human ear and that no composer could have written down before hand. The copyright disintegrated, can one be author or owner of frequencies or sounds? The storage mediums conserve sounds that had always been just copies of copies. The composer or author works under contingent conditions; he can only create the consistencies that Deleuze means when coupled to the sound machine. Units also dissolve on the side of the receiver. Echo effects allow sound hallucinations to occur, they delocalise the perception apparatus; forms of perception develop that, strangely, one had previously attributed to lunatics or schizophrenics.

KD: I would like to concentrate on the term schizophrenia. How would you describe that in the music – a process of structures disintegrating, which were, in a subjective sense, relations, identity, ego /alter ego?

AS: Since the fifties, in musique concrete, later in rock, in the industrial music up to techno one heard diverse noises, screaming, chirping, creaking, hissing. Actually all noises that one related more to madness. With the mechanical production of these noises it became clear that madness itself is a metaphor for techniques. The use of these techniques in music leads to de-territorialisation currents. They disintegrate musical forms, shatter sound material into varied elements that are ordered according to new speed and time relations of variables, like fastness and slowness. Also spatial relations became unstable. In the stereo-system the sounds wander from below to above, from left to right and vice versa, the place from which the signal originates becomes audible, but is at the same time a non place. Schizo hearing becomes necessary because the schizo himself is de-territorialised; he follows the sound currents, he plays with the effects and the forces of drugs, without taking any drugs. He is not a clinical case – quite the contrary to the masses of ecstasy eaters at the large raves, who quickly become objects of the clinical and pharmaceutical industry. The schizo must log on to the sound machinery, he must make it function, produce diverse sound occurrences. Techno is also schizo music in the sense that it deconstructs certain rules and forms that pop music imposed on the sounds; on the other hand it has to invent rules itself, that are subject to consistency operations. At the same time the music repeatedly falls back into the old rules, or it builds itself new immobile models, the process of de-territorialisation becomes blocked.

KD: Deleuze and Guattari described the movement of the de- and re-territorialisation in the first book 'Anti-Oedipus', the forerunner to 'Mille Plateaux'.

AS: Both are types of movement. The de-territorialisation is the movement by which one leaves the territory. It is a process of disintegrating blockades, the exploding of established channels, etc. Without discussing the individual processes of the de-territorialisation that Deleuze names, one can say, somewhat simplified, that the de-territorialisation is always accompanied by re-territorialisation, no the sound results of his notation only retrospectively, and because the demands of the composer on the music machine could only be relatively realised through the interpreter's increased practice, so the interface – person / machine – must itself become thuld just be a return. Of course that happens too, one only needs to think about the phenomena of the DJ. It is taking on the character of the star cult again, with all the imaginary identifications, that always see the self in the other person. This is a comedy of mistakes, that become completely obscene. The other only exists as a special image, an image manufactured by the media industry. The expansion of these images, the manufactured star type, is the hero-worship of the average, according to Adorno. Or take the music itself. The use of melodies and voices, that claim to be the music itself, create an aesthetic of boredom, a self sufficient repetition. The tracks are overwhelmed by signature tunes, the potential fascism that Deleuze speaks of in music. Td that no composer could have written down before hand. The copyright disintegrated, can one be author or owner of frequencies or sounds? The storage mediums conserve sounds that had always been just copies of copies. The composer or author works under contingent conditions; he can only create the consistencies that Deleuze means when coupled to the sound machine. Units also dissolve on the side of the receiver. Echo effects allow sound hallucinations to occur, they delocalise the perception apparatus; form blocking and damming up of the runs, in which electronic music or techno is just beginning to liberate itself from the traditional rules. Suddenly the producers outputs are made up only of sounds and signals that are automatically programmed in the synthesisers; one is content with the regurgitation of a standardised repertoire of sounds, that result from certain switches. The principles of the production associate with each other again. The order from order

principle, as the system theory calls it; not the order from noise principle, order that doesn't reject noises, rather welcomes them and plays with them. One techno context needs to be avoided now, the one that bonds the music to a hardware (Roland, etc.) and software (Cubase, etc.) syntax. This can be done by switching the machines away from their regular use and making the interfaces a new issue; repeatedly transforming the sound itself through the different effect machines. One could similarly discuss the effects of techno on the body or the space that it is being performed in.

KD: Can you describe the beginning of the raves and techno parties – where the subversive impulse was to be found?

AS: The immediate subversive moment at all small illegal events, warehouse parties, was in the fact that the face check at the door of every disco didn't take place. The production of the events themselves still contained all the characteristics of the theatrics found in the discotheques. These are also spaces that are not formed by walls and partitions but by light and music; a simulated space that creates a mobile image of itself, through lasers and spotlights, that is indistinguishable from itself. The illegal events, however, reduce the streams of light radically – fog and strobe light – so can the music multiply its effects. These events are more sound events than visual space. One logs on to the sound machine and its noises, in that one becomes a part of its surroundings and accepts the synthesis of light and music. In dancing the body disintegrates into elements, elements that can take on varying degrees of speed, elements that can be influenced in completely different ways and manners. We translate the flowing stimulations into speed; speeding up, bringing into circulation, whirling rotations, that creates their own space, as if the discovery of speed serves to capture forces, forces transmitted by the music. But at the same time spaces come into being, in which the alignments are broken or tumble into catastrophe. This is the kind place that the rave seems to be today. Here the visual and non visual pillars of the traditional geometric order of the rooms are newly defined. This type of room is not peculiar to the illegal events; it is a connection for many different room elements, a space in which the reinstatement of a middle point, or centre, controls the dimensions of the room, defines the positions, within which the masses are to move. An organised model develops that is thought out into the last detail, made of tactile, visual and sound dams, that control the sound and body currents. Even the theatrics of the discotheque disappears. In short: reduction of sound to the signature tune and a stupid metric – the bass drum leads all – existence of a space for heards. Perhaps Adorno's phrase is right: 'Fun is bathing in steel.'

*Translators note: Rauschen – german word for rustle (leaves, silk, radio),rush (flowing water, wind), roar (storm, waves); rausch – intoxication, drunkenness; rauschshend – rustling etc., orgiastic (party) swelling (music). In this case the word is used to describe the electrical noise

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